

**Wheels:** A letter from Brad of Centerville says, “I own a 1987 Mercedes Benz 560 SL (large engine) with 110,000 miles. It holds 9 quarts of engine oil, which I change each 3000 miles. I mostly drive short distances when I do drive it. There is no visible signs of smoke, nor signs of leakage. Yet, each 1100 miles, it is a quart low on oil. Surely this is not normal or do I have a serious problem? If so, where do I begin to check for the problem? Thank you.”

**Halderman:** There are several possible causes for the use of a quart of oil during 1100 miles. This could be normal usage for an engine with over 100,000 miles due to wear of piston rings and deterioration of valve stem seals. Short driving cycles, especially in cold weather, can cause some engine oil usage because engine parts are operating at lower than normal operating temperatures. (Is the engine reaching normal operating temperature? If not, the thermostat may be defective.) If the oil usage has always occurred since new, try operating the engine one quart low and keep checking if the oil level drops any lower. It has been my experience that some oil consumption can occur if different brands of oil are used even though all oils are designed to be compatible. Try staying with your favorite brand of engine oil and use the viscosity (thickness or SAE rating) recommended in the owner’s manual.

